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9. CALLS OF HARRIERS (*CIRCUS* SPP.) NEAR HYDERABAD, ANDHRA PRADESH

We have been monitoring the roosting behaviour of three species of harriers — marsh harrier *Circus aeruginosus*, Montagu's harrier *C. pygargus* and pale harrier *C. macrourus* which come to roost on the ground in a grassland 18 km north of Hyderabad.

Before roosting the harriers show a pre-roost behaviour by flying over their roost site just before or after sunset. It was during this time that we heard some of the birds making a distinct shrill call. There is, however, no record of any such call for these birds in their wintering grounds (HANDBOOK OF THE BIRDS OF INDIA AND PAKISTAN, Ali, S. and Ripley, S.D. 1983). But in all our four years (1985-89) of watching them, we have recorded them calling.

We heard the birds calling about 300 m from us. Twice a male Montagu's harrier came close to us. Its call, roughly *keck-keck-keck*, lasted a few seconds.

Male pale harriers also gave a similar but a more shrill call. Marsh harriers have, however, remained silent.

The calls were heard throughout their wintering period (September to February), but were seen to be dependent on the number of birds during the pre-roost. If only a few birds came to roost then no call was heard. We also never heard any call at any other time of the day.

The exact purpose of such calls remains a mystery, but perhaps it has something to do with identifying its own species in the mixed pre-roost gathering. It is also not clear whether only males of the above two species call, since in the pre-roost gathering it is impossible to distinguish from a distance the species and sex which are calling.

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December 2, 1989

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10. BLUEBREASTED BANDED RAIL *RALLUS STRIATUS* LINN. NESTING IN KERALA

According to the BIRDS OF KERALA (Ali, S. 1969) the nesting of the bluebreasted banded rail *Rallus striatus* had not been recorded from Kerala. According to the Report of the Vernay Survey of the Eastern Ghats (1936, *JBNHS* 38: 690) J. Darling found a nest with five eggs in a swamp at Sultan's Battery, Wynaad, on 26 August 1874. There seems to be no later report of the breeding of this rail in Kerala. We place on record the discovery of a nest of this bird at Kavassery (Palghat district, Kerala, c. 90 m above msl).

On 28 July 1989 Achuthankutty Nair, while walking along a bund in his paddy fields in the evening, saw a waterhen-like bird flying out of a dense growth of grass and lentils almost at his feet. This led to his discovery of a nest containing 5 eggs. He showed me the nest the next morning. After that, we frequently visited the nest and spent about an hour every time in the hope

of seeing the occupants of the nest. At 0930 hrs on 30 July 1989 there were seven eggs in the nest; at 0900 hrs on 1 August 1989, it contained eight eggs; and at 1700 hrs on 2 August, nine eggs. No more eggs were laid. On our visit on 10 August 1989, the bird was so agitated that we decided to leave the nest alone for some days. On our next visit at 1745 hrs on 15 August 1989, we found that all the eggs had hatched. Nine egg-shells, each with a large hole on one side, were in the nest. We could not find the chicks or the parents anywhere in the vicinity. **Occupants of the nest:** Eight times — on 28 July, 30 July, 1 August (once in the morning and again in the evening), 2 August, 6 August and 10 August — a bird was flushed from the nest. But on most occasions, apart from noting that it was a rail smaller than a whitebreasted waterhen *Amaurornis phoenicurus*, we could not get any details as the bird just fluttered into